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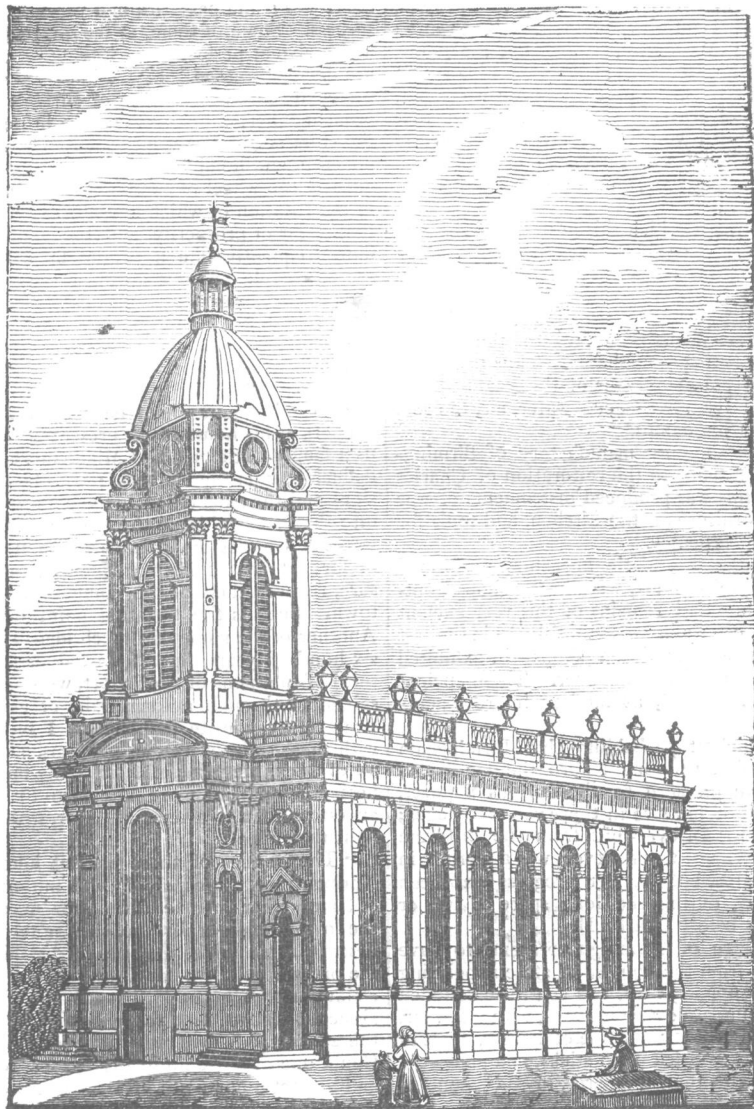
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ST. PHILIP'S CHURCH, BIRMINGHAM.

THE HISTORY OF BIRMINGHAM.*

As we perceive that our contemporary, the London Penny Magazine, finds it convenient to make an occasional foray on our borders, in its description of some of our ancient castles and cathedrals, it will not, we suppose, be considered unfair in us now and then to make, in return, an inroad upon what might be considered the legitimate boundaries of its territory. The work from which we have copied the engravings in our present number, and which we may, *en passant*, remark, was sent to us for notice in our Journal, is a curiosity in its way. It is a compound, not very well mixed up, of two authors, between the periods of whose labours an epoch of nearly half a century intervened—the one quaint and piquant in

his style, the other, though cutting, rather common-place—the one treating of life as it was fifty years ago, the other of things as they are at present; but where the one leaves off, or the other begins, is left to the judgment of the reader to discern. In the midst of all this, the entire volume is marked by the deepest tints of party spirit—an ingredient, by the way, which should never be allowed to appear in a mere History or Guide to a place.—Notwithstanding all its defects, however, it is well worthy the perusal of those who are fond of tracing human character in the rises and falls of fate and fortune; and of following the honest, industrious, and intelligent individual, who, by the proper application of his energies and exertions, has risen from the lowest to the highest situations in life. The volume is also worthy of notice, as presenting a kind of panoramic view of the various trades and manufactures carried forward, to such an extraordinary extent, in this “mistress of the arts;” and as showing how a large fortune may be realised from the manufacture of such trifling things as pins and buttons.

* The History of Birmingham, by W. Hutton, F. A. S. With considerable Additions. Illustrated with many Engravings, a Map of the Town, &c. London: George Berger. Birmingham: James Guest.

The following extracts, picked up here and there in glancing over the volume, will serve as an index of its contents:—

"Birmingham lies near the centre of the kingdom, in the north-west extremity of the county of Warwick, in a kind of peninsula, the northern part of which is bounded by Handsworth, in the county of Stafford, and the southern by King's Norton, in that of Worcester. It is distant from London, one hundred and nine miles; Liverpool, ninety-six; Manchester, eighty-one; Sheffield, seventy-six; Bristol, eighty-seven; Warwick, twenty; Coventry, eighteen; Worcester, twenty-five; Dudley, nine; Wolverhampton, fourteen; Walsall, nine; and from Lichfield, fifteen. As no part of the town lies flat, the approach is on every side by ascent, except that from Hales Owen, north-west, which gives a free access of air, even to the most secret recesses of habitation. Thus eminently situated, the sun can exercise his full powers of exhalation.

"The foundation upon which this mistress of the arts is erected, is one solid mass of dry reddish sand. The vapours that rise from the earth are the great promoters of disease; but here, instead of the moisture ascending to the prejudice of the inhabitant, the contrary is evident; for the water descends through the pores of the sand, so that even our very cellars are habitable. Thus peculiarly favoured, this happy spot enjoys four of the greatest benefits that can attend human existence—water, air, the sun, and a situation free from damps.

"The chief, if not the only manufactory of Birmingham, from its first existence to the restoration of Charles II. was in iron: of this was produced instruments of war and of husbandry, furniture for the kitchen, and tools for the whole system of carpentry.

"The places where our athletic ancestors performed these curious productions of art, were in the shops fronting the street. Some small remains of this very ancient custom were visible, chiefly in Digbeth, till within the last twenty years, where about a dozen shops still exhibited the original music of anvil and hammer. These ancient forges have now all retreated, as modern improvements have advanced.

"As there is the highest probability that Birmingham produced her manufactures long before the landing of Cæsar, it would give pleasure to the curious inquirer, could he be informed of her size in these very early ages; but this information is for ever hid from the historian and the reader. Perhaps there never was a period in which she saw a decline, but that her progress has been certain, though slow, during the long space of two or three thousand years before Charles II.

"The ancient centre of Birmingham seems to have been the Old cross, from the number of streets pointing towards it. Let us suppose, then, this centre surrounded with less than one hundred straggling huts, without order, which we will dignify with the name of houses, built of timber, the interstices wattled with sticks, and plastered with mud, covered with thatch, boards, or sods, none of them higher than the ground story. The meaner sort only one room, which served for three uses, shop, kitchen, and lodging-room; the door for two, it admitted the people and the light. The better sort two rooms, and some three, for work, for the kitchen, and for rest; all three in a line, and sometimes fronting the street.

"If the curious reader chooses to see a picture of Birmingham, in the time of the Britons, he will find one in the turnpike road, between Hales Owen and Stourbridge, called the Lie Waste, alias, Mud City. The houses stand in every direction, composed of one large and ill-formed brick, scooped into a tenement, burnt by the sun, and often destroyed by the frost. The males naked, the females accomplished breeders. The children at the age of three months, take a singular hue from the sun and the soil, which continues for life. The rags which cover them leave no room for the observer to guess at the sex. Only one person upon the premises presumed to carry a belly, and he a landlord. We might as well look for the moon in a coal-pit, as for stays or white linen in the City of Mud. The principal tool in business is the hammer, and the beast of burden the ass.

"It does not appear that Birmingham, from its first formation, to the present day, was ever the habitation of a gentleman, the lords of the manor excepted. But if there are no originals among us, we can produce many striking likenesses: The smoke of Birmingham has been very propitious to their growth, but not to their maturity. Gentlemen, as well as buttons, have been stamped here; but like them, when finished, are moved off. They both originate from a very uncouth state, *without form or comeliness*; and pass through various stages, uncertain of success. Some of them, at length, receive the last polish, and arrive at perfection, while others, ruined by a flaw, are deemed *wasters*. I have known the man of opulence direct his gilt chariot out of Birmingham, who first approached her an helpless orphan in rags. I have known the chief magistrate of fifty thousand people, fall from his phaeton, and humbly ask bread at a parish vestry. Frequently the wheel of capricious fortune describes a circle, in the rotation of which a family experiences, alternately, the height of prosperity and the depth of distress; but more frequently, like a pendulum, it describes only the arc of a circle, and that always at the bottom. Many fine estates have been struck out of the anvil, valuable possessions raised by the tongs, and superb houses, in a twofold sense, erected by the trowel. The paternal ancestor of the late Sir Charles Holte was a native of this place, and purchaser, in the beginning of Edward the Third, of the several manors which have been the honour and the support of his house to the present time. We have among us a family of the name of Middlemore, of great antiquity, deducible from the conquest; who held the chief possessions and the chief offices in the county, and who matched into the first families in the kingdom, but fell with the interest of Charles the First; and are now in that low ebb of fortune, that I have frequently, with a gloomy pleasure, relieved them at the common charity board of the town. Such is the tottering point of human greatness. Another of the name of Bracebridge, who, for more than six hundred years, figured in the first ranks of life. A third of the name of Mountfort, who shone with meridian splendour through a long train of ages. As genealogy was ever a favourite amusement, I have often conversed with these solitary remains of tarnished lustre, but find in all of them, the pride of their family buried with its greatness—they pay no more attention to the arms of their ancestors, than to a scrap of paper, with which they would light their pipe.

"The families of those ancient heroes, of Saxon and Norman race, are chiefly by the mutations of time, and of state, either become extinct, or as above, reduced to the lowest verge of fortune. Those few, therefore, whose descent is traceable, may be carried higher than that of the present nobility; for I know none of these last, who claim peerage beyond Edward the First, about 1295. Hence it follows, that for antiquity, alliance, and blood, the advantage is evidently in favour of the lowest class. Could one of those illustrious shades return to the earth and inspect human actions, he might behold one of his descendants dancing at the lathe; another, tippling with his dark brethren of the apron; a third, humbly soliciting from other families, such favours as were formerly granted by his own; a fourth, imitating modern grandeur, by contracting debts he never designs to pay; and a fifth, snuff of departed light, poaching, like a thief in the night, upon the very manors possessed by his ancestors.

"If we survey Birmingham in the twelfth century, we shall find her crowded with timber, within and without; her streets dirty and narrow, but much trodden. The inhabitant became an early encroacher upon her narrow streets, and sometimes the lord was the greatest. Her houses were mean and low, but few reaching higher than one story, perhaps none more than two; composed of wood and plaster—she was a stranger to brick. Her public buildings consisted solely of one, *the church*. If we behold her in the fourteenth century, we shall observe her private buildings multiplied more than improved; her narrow streets, by trespass, become narrower; her public buildings increased to four, two in the town and two at a distance, the Priory, of stone, founded by contribution, at the head of which stood her lord; the Guild, of timber,

now the Free School; and Deritend Chapel, of the same materials, resembling a barn, with something like an awkward dove-cot, at the west end, by way of steeple. If we take a view of the inhabitants, we shall find them industrious, plain, and honest. In curious operations, known only to a few, the artist was amply paid. Nash in his History of Worcestershire, gives us a curious list of anecdotes, from the churchwardens' ledger, of Hales-Owen. I shall transcribe two, nearly three hundred years old. '*Paid for bread and ale, to make my Lord Abbot drink, in rogation week, 2d.*' What should we now think of an ecclesiastical nobleman, accepting a two-penny treat from a country churchwarden? This displays an instance of moderation in a class of people famous for luxury. It shows also the amazing reduction of money: the same sum which served my Lord Abbot four days, would now be devoured by a journeyman in four minutes.—'1498, paid for reapeyng the organs, to the organ-maker at Bromicham, 10s.' Birmingham then, we find, discovered the powers of genius in the finer arts, as well as in iron. By 'the organ-maker,' we should suppose there was but one. It appears that the art of acquiring riches was as well understood by our fathers as by us; while an artist could receive as much money for tuning an organ, as would purchase an acre of land, or treat near half a gross of Lord Abbots.

"Edward Birmingham was born in 1497, and succeeded his grandfather at the age of three. During his minority, Henry the VII. 1500, granted the wardship to Edward, Lord Dudley.

"But after a peaceable possession of a valuable estate for thirty-seven years, the time was now arrived, when the mounds of justice must be broken down by the weight of power, a whole deluge of destruction enter, and overwhelm an ancient and illustrious family, in the person of an innocent man. The world would view the diabolical transaction with amazement, none daring to lend assistance to the unfortunate; not considering that property should ever be under the protection of law; and, what was Edward's case to-day, might be that of any other man to-morrow. But the oppressor kept fair with the crown, and the crown held a rod of iron over the people. Suffer me to tell the mournful tale from Dagdale's Antiquities of Warwickshire.

"John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland, a man of great wealth, unbounded ambition, and one of the basest characters of the age, was possessor of Dudley Castle, and the fine estate belonging to it. He wished to add Birmingham to his vast domain. Edward Birmingham, therefore, was privately sounded, respecting the disposal of his manor; but as money was not wanted, and as the place had been the honour and the residence of his family for many centuries, it was out of the reach of purchase. Northumberland was so charmed with its beauty, he was determined to possess it; and perhaps the manner in which he accomplished his design, cannot be paralleled in the annals of infamy.

"He procured two or three rascals of his own temper, and rather of mean appearance, to avoid suspicion, to take up their quarters for a night or two in Birmingham, and gain secret intelligence when Edward Birmingham should ride out; and what road. This done, one of the rascals was to keep before the others, but all took care that Edward should easily overtake them. Upon his arrival at the first class, the villains joined him, entered into chat, and all moved soberly together till they reached the first man; when, on a sudden, the strangers with Edward drew their pistols and robbed their brother villain, who no doubt lost a considerable sum after a decent resistance. Edward was easily known, apprehended, and committed as one of the robbers; the others were not to be found.

"Edward immediately saw himself on the verge of destruction. He could only *allege*, but not *prove* his innocence. All the proof the case could admit of was against him.

"Northumberland (then only Lord L'Isle) hitherto had succeeded to his wish; nor was Edward long in suspense. Private hints were given him, that the only way to save his life, was to make Northumberland his friend; and this

probably might be done, by resigning him his manor of Birmingham; with which the unfortunate Edward reluctantly complied.

"Northumberland thinking a conveyance insufficient, caused Edward to yield his estate into the hands of the king, and had interest enough in that age of injustice to procure a ratification from a weak parliament, by which means he endeavoured to throw the odium off his own character and fix it upon theirs, and also to procure to himself a safer title.

"In the act there is a reservation of £40 per annum, during the lives of the said Edward and his wife. It appears also by an expression in the act, that Edward was brought to trial and found guilty.

"At the northern extremity of the parish of Birmingham, but in the adjoining parish of Handsworth, and county of Stafford, is a hill called *Soho*, at the foot of which stands the far-famed manufactory of that name, adjacent to the mansion and grounds which occupy the summit and declivities.

"In the year 1757, John Wyrley, of Hamstead, Esq. Lord of the Manor of Handsworth, granted a lease for ninety-nine years of certain tracts of common land here, and certain inclosed lands, with liberty to make a cut for turning Hockley Brook and forming a pool, in order to the erection of a water mill. A small house and feeble mill for rolling metal, were consequently erected. In 1762, the late Matthew Boulton, who then carried on a steel toy manufactory in Birmingham, the place of his nativity, purchased this lease, with all the premises and appurtenances, for the purposes of his trade, and soon afterwards, having enlarged and increased the buildings, and rebuilt the mill, transplanted the whole of his manufactory from Birmingham to Soho; but still further accommodation being requisite for the advancement of his great designs, Mr. Boulton therefore, in 1764, laid the foundation of the present noble manufactory, which was finished in the following year, at the expense of £9,000. From that period he turned his attention to a greater variety of branches of manufacture; and in conjunction with Mr. Fothergill, then his partner, established a mercantile correspondence throughout Europe. Impelled by an ardent attachment to the arts, and by the patriotic ambition of bringing his favourite Soho to the highest degree of perfection, the ingenious proprietor soon established a seminary of artists, for drawing and modelling; and men of genius were sought for and liberally patronised, whose exertions produced a successful imitation of the *or-molu*, in a variety of metallic ornaments, consisting of vases, tripods, candelabras, &c. manufactured with superior skill and taste. From this elegant branch of the business the artists were led, by a natural and easy transition, to that of wrought silver; and other useful and ornamental arts gradually followed.

"Mr. Boulton finding from experience that the water power at Soho was insufficient for his purposes, though aided by the power of horses, in 1767 put up a steam engine, on Savery's plan, with the intention of returning and raising his water about twenty-four feet high; but this proving unsatisfactory to him, he soon after formed an acquaintance with his subsequent partner and friend, James Watt, of Glasgow, who in 1765, had invented several valuable improvements upon the steam engine, which, in fact, made it a new machine. For these improvements Mr. Watt had obtained a patent in January, 1769, and afterwards came to settle at Soho, where in that year he erected one of his improved engines, and after full proof of its utility, obtained in 1775 a prolongation of the term of his patent for twenty-five years from that date. He then entered into partnership with Mr. Boulton, and they established at Soho a very extensive manufactory of these engines, which are now adapted to almost every mechanical purpose where great power is requisite.

"The application of this improved steam-engine at Soho to raise and return the water, extended the powers of the water-mill, which Mr. Boulton therefore a second time rebuilt, upon a much larger scale, and several engines were afterwards erected here for other purposes, whereby

the manufactory was greatly extended, the source of mechanical power being thus unlimited.

"In order to obtain the desired degree of perfection in the manufacture of their steam-engines, Messrs. Boulton and Watt established a large and complete iron foundry at Smethwick, a convenient distance westward from Soho, and having the advantage of communication with the Birmingham Canal.

"The applicability of the steam engine to the purpose and various processes of coining, led to the erection here in 1788, of a *coining mill*, which was afterwards much improved, and acquired great celebrity for efficiency and dispatch.

"Previous to Mr. Boulton's engagement to supply Government with copper coin, in order to bring his apparatus to the greatest perfection, he exercised it in coining silver money for Sierra Leone and the African Company, and copper for the East India Company and Bermudas. Various beautiful medals were likewise struck here from time to time, for the purpose of employing ingenious artists, and encouraging the revival of that branch of art, which in this kingdom had long been on the decline.

"The penny and two-penny pieces of 1797, the half-pence and farthings of 1799, the pence, half-pence, and farthings of 1806 and 1807, (all of excellent pattern and workmanship,) and we believe the whole of the copper coinage of George the Third, which forms the principal part of that now in circulation, issued from the Soho Mint; at which the five shilling bank tokens issued in 1804 were also struck, and a coinage for the Russian government.

"In a national view, Mr. Boulton's undertakings were highly valuable and important. By collecting round him artists of various descriptions, rival talents were called forth, and by successive competition have been multiplied to an extent highly beneficial to the public. A barren heath has been covered with plenty and population; and these works, which in their infancy were little known or attended to, now cover several acres, give employment to some hundreds of persons, and are said to be the first of their kind in Europe. Mr. Boulton ultimately pur-

chased the fee-simple of Soho and much of the adjoining land.

"The liberal spirit and taste of the worthy proprietor was further exercised not only in the mansion, wherein he resided, but in the adjoining gardens, groves, and pleasure grounds, which, at the same time that they form an agreeable separation from the residence, render Soho, with its fine pool of water, a much-admired scene of picturesque beauty, where the sweets of solitude and retirement may be enjoyed, as if far distant from the busy hum of men.

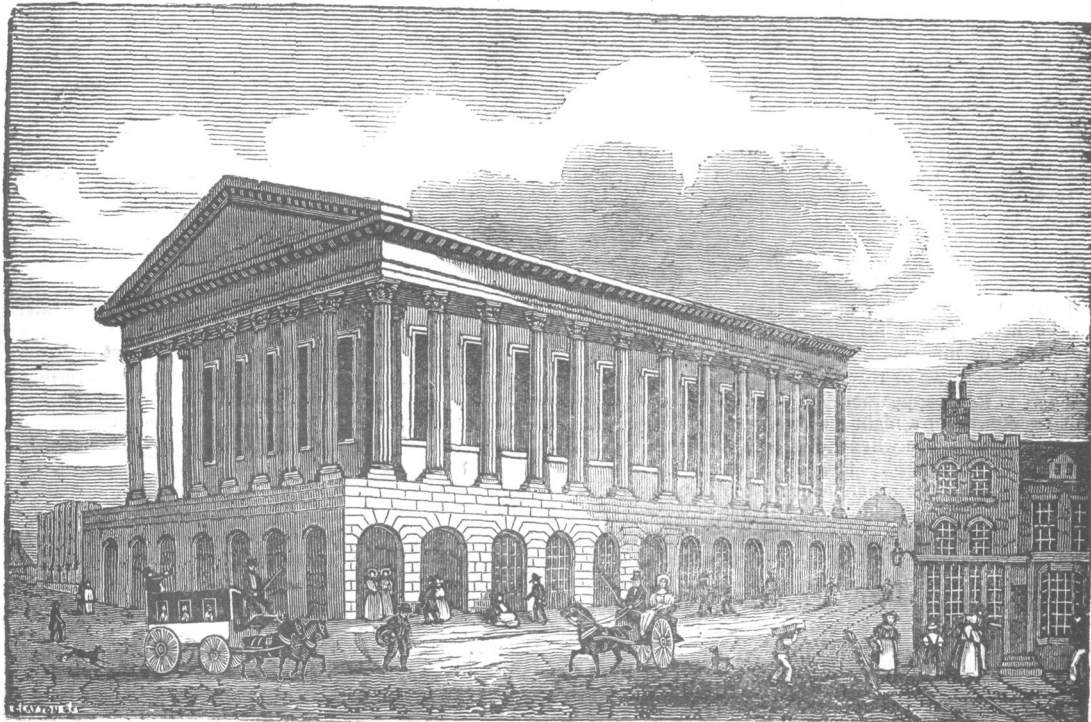
"The elder Messrs. Boulton and Watt are now both deceased, but the various manufactories are continued under several firms by the son of each, *Matthew Robinson Boulton and James Watt*.

ST. PHILIP'S CHURCH.

(See Engraving on the first page.)

"This curious piece of architecture, the steeple of which is erected after the model of St. Paul's, in London, but without its weight, does honour to the age that raised it, and to the place that contains it. Perhaps the eye of the critic cannot point out a fault, which the hand of the artist can mend: perhaps, too, the attentive eye cannot survey this pile of building, without communicating to the mind a small degree of pleasure. If the materials are not proof against time, it is rather a misfortune to be lamented, than an error to be complained of, the country producing no better.

"When I first saw St. Philip's, in the year 1741, at a proper distance, uncrowded with houses, for there were none to the north, New Hall excepted, untarnished with smoke, and illuminated by a western sun, I was delighted with its appearance, and thought it then, what I do now, and what others will in future, *the pride of the place*. If we assemble the beauties of the edifice, which covers a rood of ground; the spacious area of the church-yard, occupying four acres, ornamented with walks in great perfection, shaded with trees in double and treble ranks, and surrounded with buildings in elegant taste; perhaps its equal cannot be found in the British dominions."



THE TOWN HALL, BIRMINGHAM.

"This splendid building was erected from designs, drawn by Joseph Hansom, who, in conjunction with Mr. Welsh, his partner, contracted for its erection, for the sum of £17,000, with about £1700 for extras.

"A steam engine was employed to saw the stone; two hundred thousand bricks were made from the clay out of the foundation. A new species of machinery was constructed by Mr. Hansom, to raise the principals of the